

Message Text

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ACTION COME-00

INFO OCT-01 AF-06 ISO-00 AID-05 CIAE-00 EB-07 FRB-01

INR-07 NSAE-00 USIA-15 TRSE-00 XMB-04 OPIC-06 SP-02

CIEP-02 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 INT-05 STR-04 /071 W

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R 091330Z FEB 76 ZDK

FM AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4433

INFO AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN

UNCLAS JOHANNESBURG 0161

E.O. 116522: N/A

TAGS: BGEN, ETRD, EMIN, SF

SUBJECT: SOUTH AFRICAN ZIRCONIUM

CAPE TOWN FOR EMBASSY

REF: STATE 029001

1. PALABORA MINING COMPANY, WITH AN ASSIST FROM THE PHOSPHATE DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (FOSKOR) IN THE SAME OREBODY, IS SOUTH AFRICA'S ONLY PRODUCER OF ZIRCONIUM (AS "BADDELEYITE"). PRODUCT SHIPPED IS CONCENTRATE ONLY, AT GUARANTEED MINIMUM 66 PERCENT ZO.

2. PRODUCTION DECLINED DURING 1975, BY ABOUT 24 PERCENT, FROM 14,814 METRIC TONS IN 1974 TO APPROXIMATELY 11,208 TONS. EXPORTS DECLINED ALSO, BY 43 PERCENT, TO 4,620 TONS. MEANWHILE, SALES FOR DOMESTIC CONSUMPTION HELD STEADY AT 3,372 TONS (COMPARED TO 3,339 TONS DURING THE PREVIOUS YEAR). STATISTICS SUGGEST THAT, WHILE OUTPUT AND EXPORTS WERE OFF, AN APPARENT TWO-YEAR COMMODITY SURPLUS OF NOTE EXISTED AT YEAR-END 1975. INDICATIONS ARE THAT "OVERPRODUCTION" DURING 1974 AND 1975 ALONE MAY HAVE TOTALED ABOUT 6,532 TONS OF ZIRCONIUM
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CONCENTRATES (1974: 3,332 TONS; 1975: APPROXIMATELY 3,200 TONS).

3. PREFERRED PORT OF EXPORT HAS BEEN COMMONLY LORENCO MARQUES. WE ARE NOT AWARE OF IMPORTANT PORT DELAYS RECENTLY (SAG DEPARTMENT OF MINES OFFICIAL AGREED TODAY THAT ORE SHIPMENTS THROUGH MOZAMBIQUE "HAVE BEEN MOVING REASONABLY WELL IN RECENT MONTHS"). GIVEN THE INFORMATION ABOVE, WE CAN THEREFORE SEE NO REASON (PRODUCT AVAILABILITY-WISE) FOR THE US FIRM'S "DIFFICULTY IN OBTAINING ZIRCONIUM".

WE HESITATE TO APPROACH PALABORA REPS DIRECTLY WITH THIS QUESTION, HOWEVER, WITHOUT THE NAME OF THE US COMPANY INVOLVED AND YOUR BRIEFING ON THE SPECIFIC ISSUE AT HAND.

4. PLEASE ADVISE, SHOULD YOU WISH FURTHER DETAILS.

GUTHRIE

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